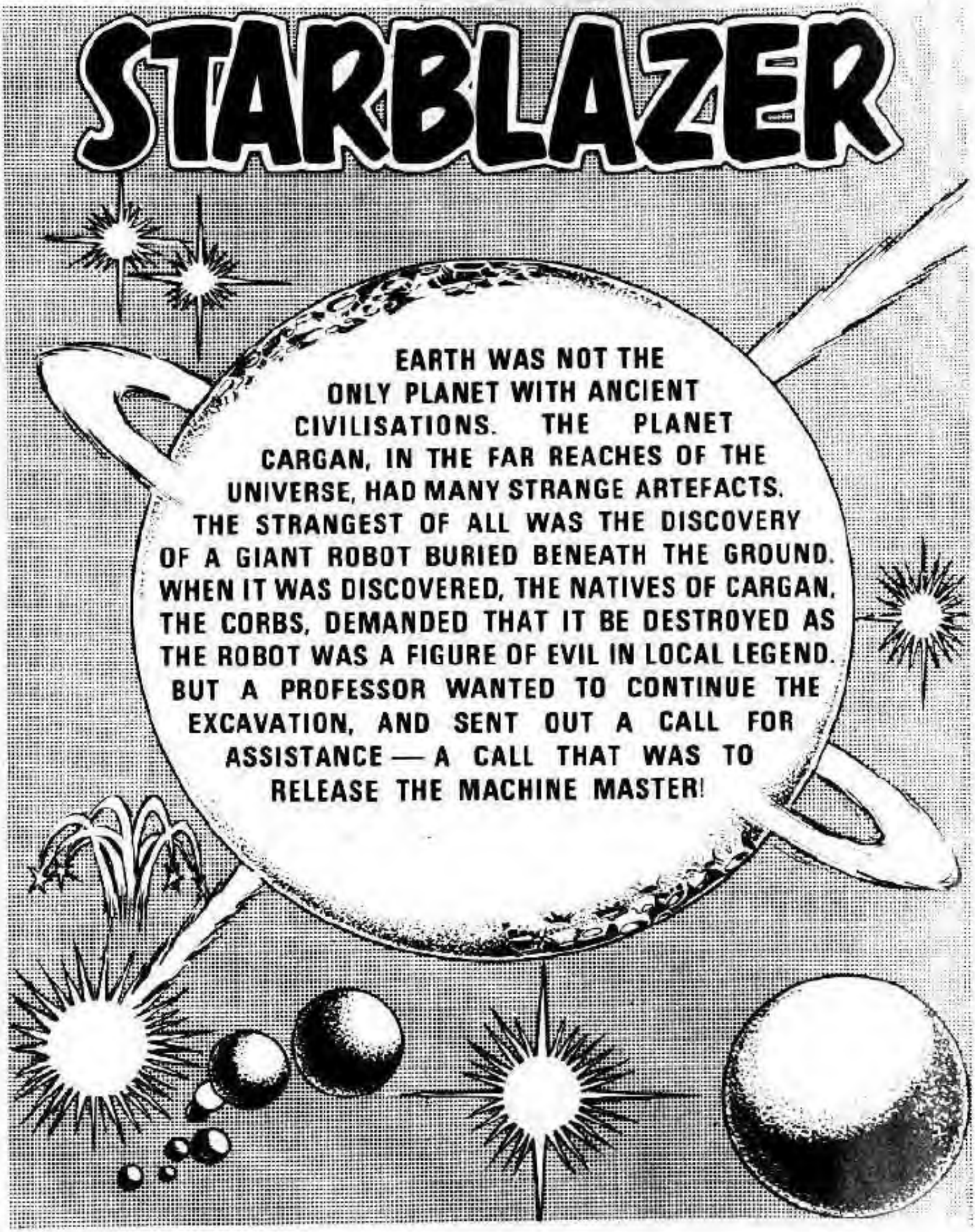
STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 32

12p

The MACHINE MASTER

STARBLAZER


EARTH WAS NOT THE ONLY PLANET WITH ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS. THE PLANET CARGAN, IN THE FAR REACHES OF THE UNIVERSE, HAD MANY STRANGE ARTEFACTS. THE STRANGEST OF ALL WAS THE DISCOVERY OF A GIANT ROBOT BURIED BENEATH THE GROUND. WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED, THE NATIVES OF CARGAN, THE CORBS, DEMANDED THAT IT BE DESTROYED AS THE ROBOT WAS A FIGURE OF EVIL IN LOCAL LEGEND. BUT A PROFESSOR WANTED TO CONTINUE THE EXCAVATION, AND SENT OUT A CALL FOR ASSISTANCE — A CALL THAT WAS TO RELEASE THE MACHINE MASTER!

The MACHINE MASTER

WE'RE CLOSE ENOUGH. CONTACT PROFESSOR CHALMERS AND FIND OUT WHAT'S WRONG.
HELLO ARGOS... THE CORBS... I... I THINK THEY ARE GOING TO ATTACK.

THE ALERT ON ARGOS SOUNDED.
SCRAMBLE, SCRAMBLE. BLUE TEAM FOR SHUTTLE FIVE.
THAT'S ME...
FLYNN
I'LL BE BACK TO FINISH OFF THIS TRAINING STINT.
FLYNN

BLUE TIGER

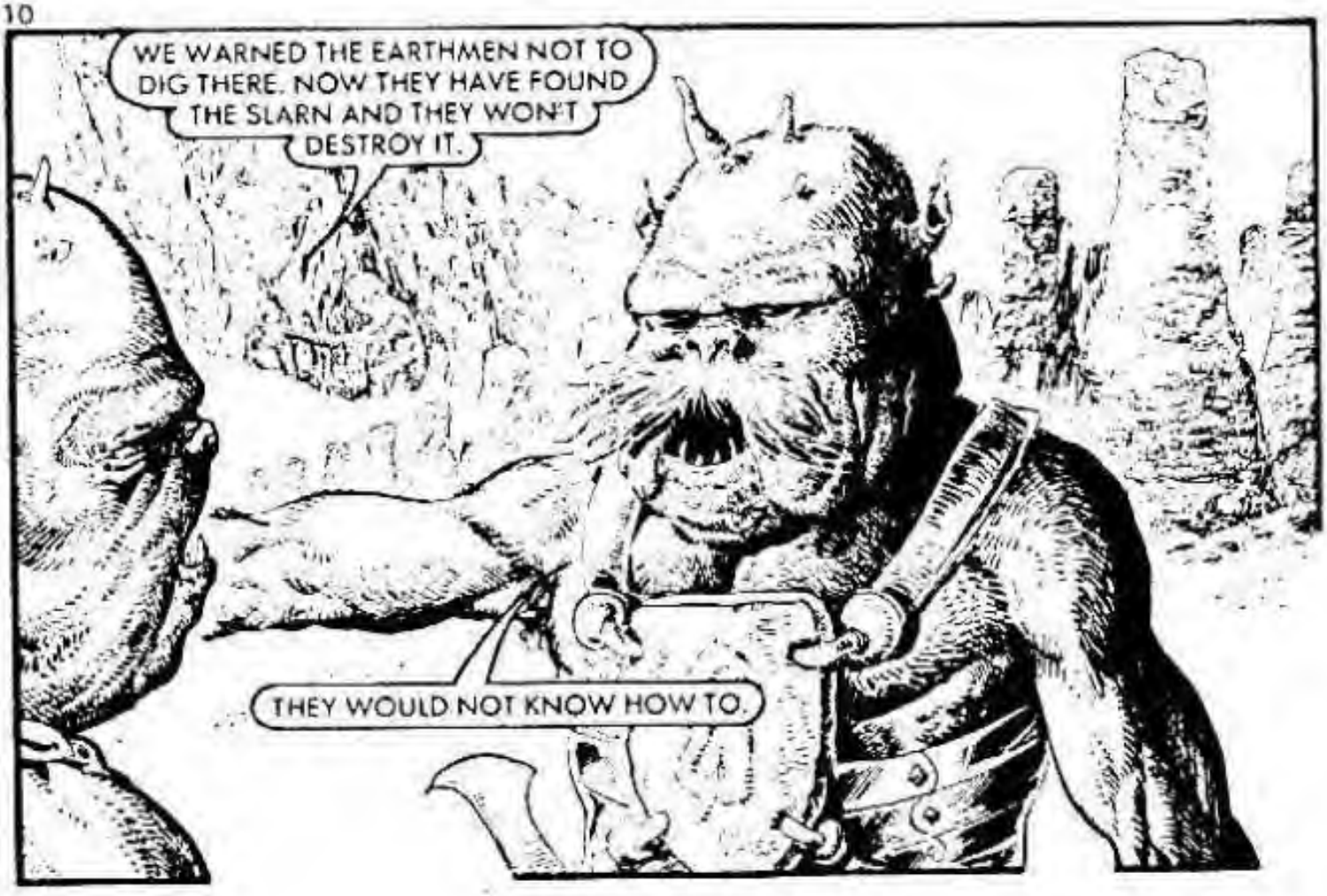
WHAT'S THE PANIC, CAPTAIN PETERS?
GET SUITED UP . . .

PROFESSOR CHALMERS HAS FOUND SOMETHING WHICH THE CORBS WANTED HIM TO DESTROY. NOW THEY WANT TO DESTROY HIM AS WELL. THEY SAY WHAT THE PROF'S FOUND IS EVIL!

IN THE SHUTTLE CRAFT BAY.
RIGHT MEN, BOARD YOUR SHUTTLE.
2
THE SHUTTLE SLIPPED OUT OF THE LAUNCH BAY.
3

ON THE PLANET'S SURFACE . . .
THE STRANGERS HAVE UNCOVERED A SLARN.
WE MUST TELL CHIEF ULA AT ONCE.

PROF . . . I THINK IT MOVED!
NONSENSE! YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO THOSE STUPID CORB STORIES AGAIN. THIS ROBOT IS AT LEAST 300 YEARS OLD. IT CAN'T BE FUNCTIONAL NOW.
ON CARGAN THE NEWS SPREAD FAST—
CHIEF ULA, THE EARTHMEN HAVE FOUND A SLARN IN THE DEAD CITY!
THEN THE MENACE STILL LIVES.


WE WARNED THE EARTHMEN NOT TO DIG THERE. NOW THEY HAVE FOUND THE SLARN AND THEY WON'T DESTROY IT.
THEY WOULD NOT KNOW HOW TO.

LEGEND SAYS OUR ANCESTORS KILLED ALL THE SLARNS EXCEPT ONE. IT MUST HAVE BEEN TRAPPED WHEN THEY DESTROYED THE SLARN CITY. WE MUST GATHER THE WARRIORS AND ATTACK—NOW.

ULA WASTED NO TIME
THE CORBS! THEY'RE ATTACKING!
BACK TO THE CAMP!

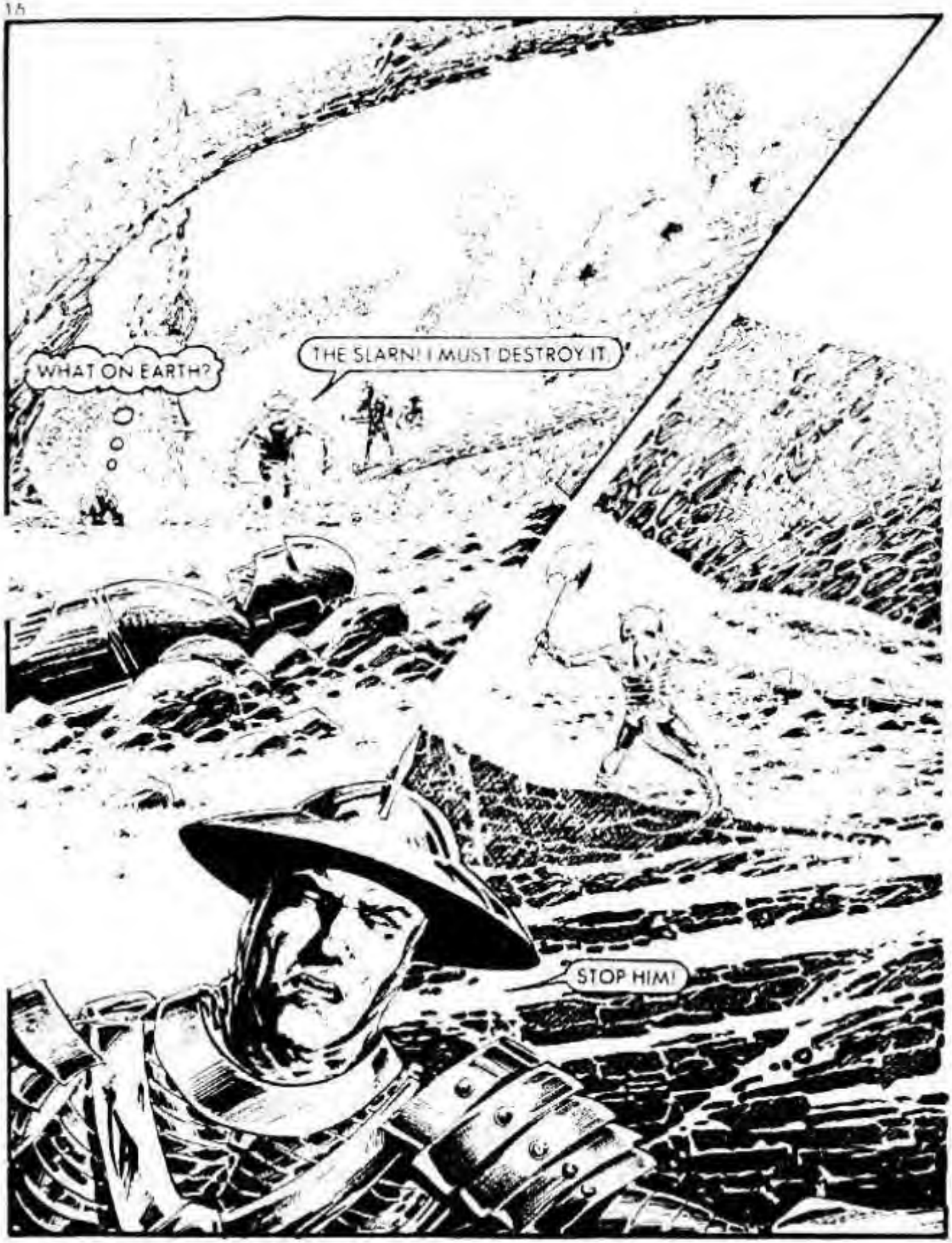
PROFESSOR, THEY'VE STOPPED ATTACKING.
. . . YES, IT LOOKS AS IF THEY WANT THAT SLARN ROBOT ALL TO THEMSELVES.
LEAVE THE HUMANS. WE MUST DESTROY THE SLARN, BEFORE IT DESTROYS US.

BLUE TEAM'S SHUTTLE ARRIVED AT THE EXCAVATION SITE.
THE CORBS HAVE OVERRUN THE SITE.
ACTION STATION! MINI-CHUTE ATTACK.

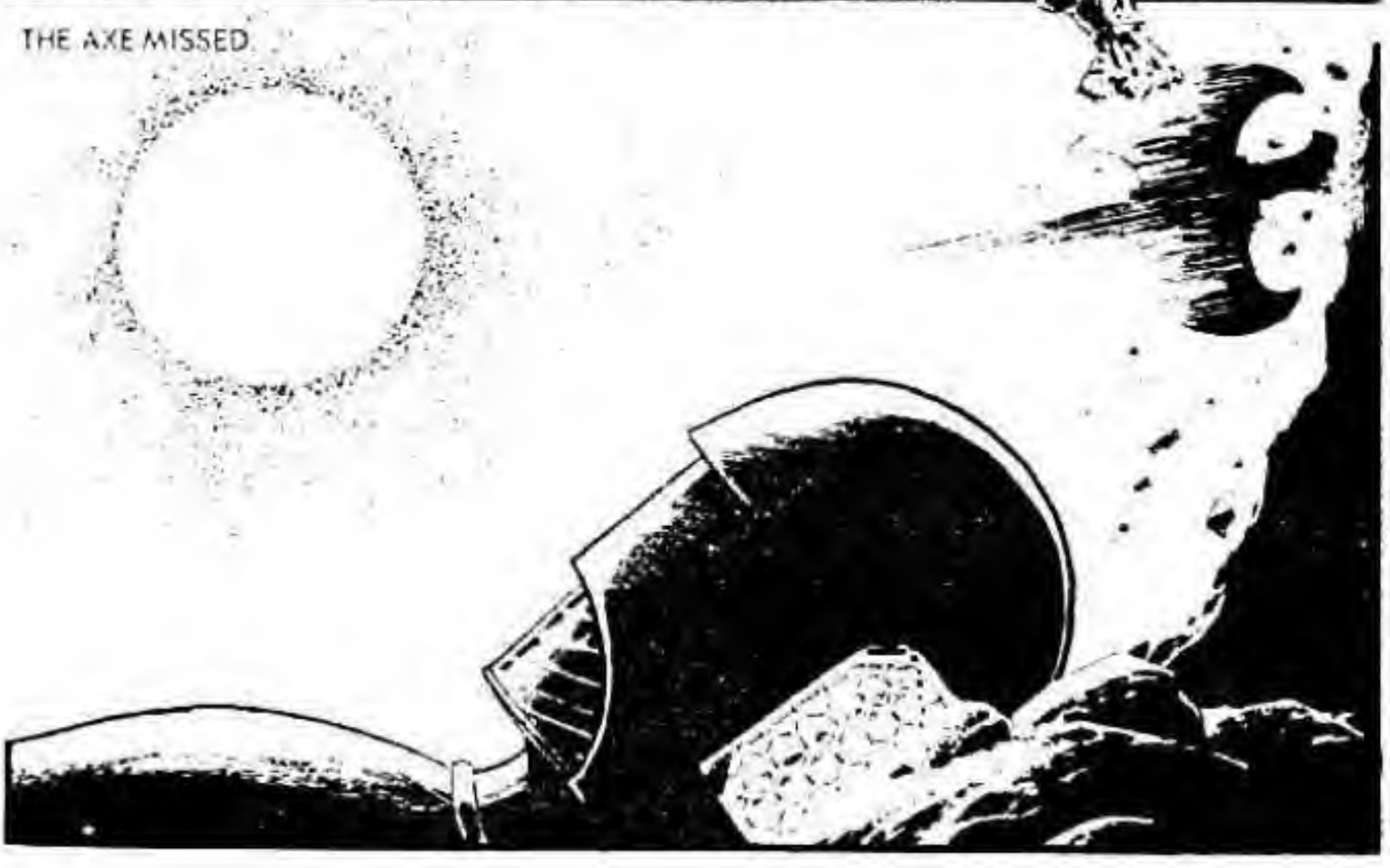
THE SPACE MARINES WERE EXPERT AT SURPRISE ATTACK.
MY AXE BREAKS! THEY ARE INVINCIBLE.
NO KILLING. JUST DRIVE THEM OFF.

BUT CHIEF ULA WAS DETERMINED TO SUCCEED.
I MUST KILL IT! THE SLARN WILL WAKE SOON.
LOOKS LIKE I'M JUST IN TIME.
GOT YOU!

BUT ULA WAS STRONG . . . AND FAST.
IT IS NOT YOU THAT I MUST KILL!


WHAT ON EARTH?
THE SLARN! I MUST DESTROY IT.
STOP HIM!

A BOLT AT HALF CHARGE HIT THE CORB CHIEF, JUST AS HE THREW HIS AXE


THE AXE MISSED

AS THE TWO SOLDIERS TENDED TO THE STUNNED ULA, NEITHER NOTICED A METALLIC EYE SLOWLY OPEN...

OR A TENTACLE WRIGGLE...
HE'S OUT COLD. LET'S GET HIM BACK TO THE SHIP.

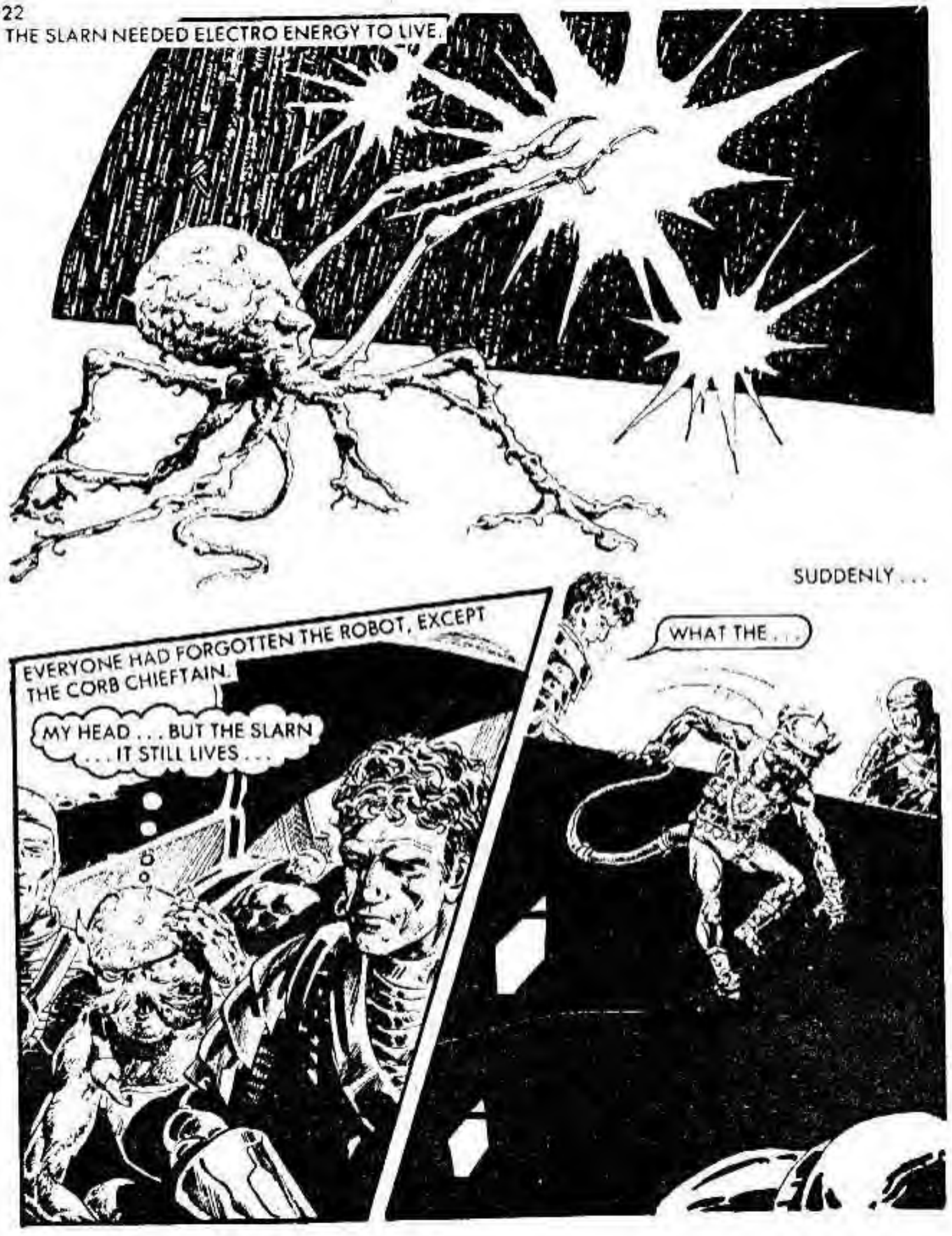
HE'LL BE OUT FOR AGES. LOAD UP THE ROBOT. WE'LL TAKE IT BACK TO EARTH AND THE PROF CAN EXAMINE IT THERE.

BUT THE REAL DANGER DID NOT COME FROM THE CORBS. AFTER YEARS OF INACTIVITY THE SUN'S POWER WAS RECHARGING THE SLARN'S SOLAR PANELS.

AS THE RECOVERY VEHICLE SPED ALONG.

THE SLARN WAS NO ORDINARY ROBOT. IT WAS BUILT TO PROTECT, AND BE USED BY THE BRAIN WHICH DIRECTED IT. FOR THE BRAIN WAS A LIVING CREATURE - THE SLARN - WHICH THE CORBS DREADED.
must . . . have . . . more . . . power.

BURIED FOR 300 YEARS, SUNLIGHT HAD NOW POWERED THE ROBOT'S CRUMBLING CELLS JUST ENOUGH TO REVIVE THE SLARN FROM THE LONG SLEEP OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION.
primitive unit . . . but it will do.


THE SLARN NEEDED ELECTRO ENERGY TO LIVE.
SUDDENLY . . .
WHAT THE . . .
EVERYONE HAD FORGOTTEN THE ROBOT, EXCEPT THE CORB CHIEFTAIN.
MY HEAD . . . BUT THE SLARN . . . IT STILL LIVES . . .

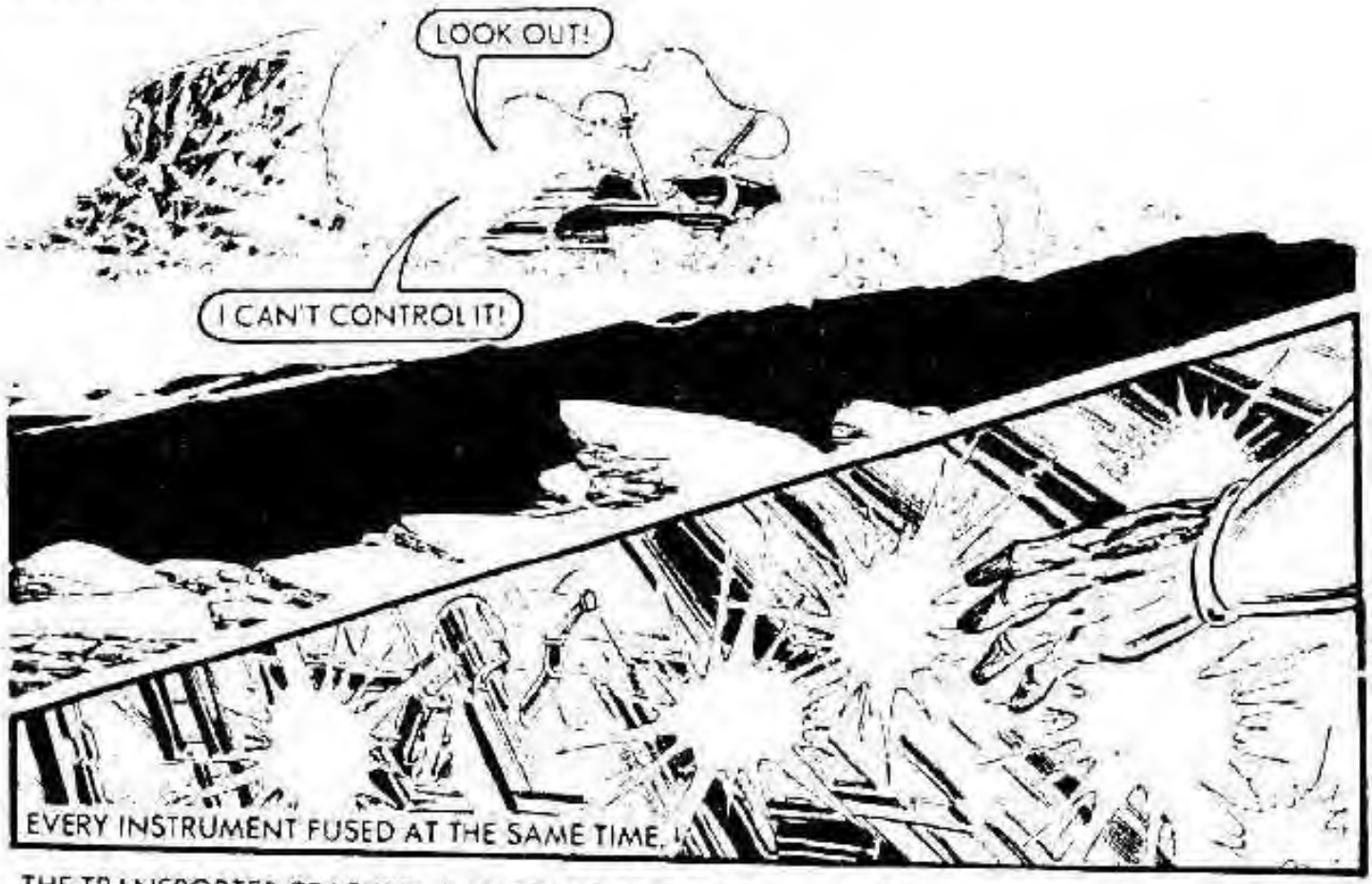
THE SLARN HAS GONE!

THERE IT IS! IT IS TAKING LIFE FROM THIS MACHINE!

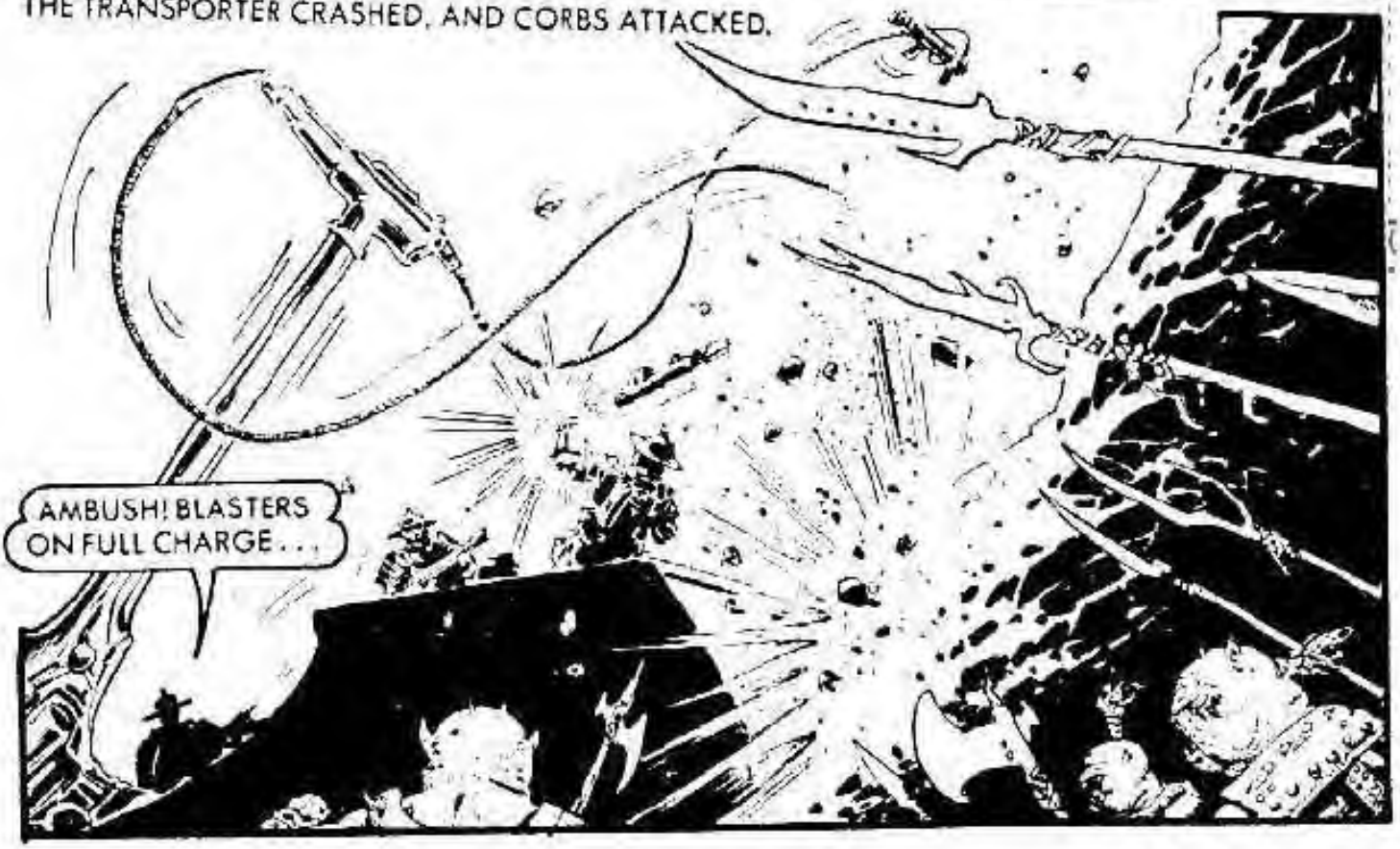
IT GROWS STRONGER. I'LL . . . UGH
THAT'S STUNNED HIM.
THE SLARN HAD FULLY CHARGED ITSELF.
I have power again. Now to take control of this craft.

...AND IT DIDN'T WASTE TIME.

THE TRANSPORTER WENT HAYWIRE.



THE TRANSPORTER CRASHED, AND CORBS ATTACKED.



FLYNN, CALL THE ARGOS! QUICK!

THE LIFTER'S HERE.

28

THE CORBS KNEW WHEN THEY WERE BEATEN.

LUCKY WE CAME LOOKING FOR YOU THIS WAY. WHAT'S THAT CORB DOING HERE?
HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A HOSTAGE—NOW WE'RE STUCK WITH HIM.
YOU'D BETTER REPORT TO THE CAPTAIN AFTER WE TAKE OFF.
TAKE OFF? NO!
THE SLARN IS ABOARD . . . THERE IS DANGER . . .
GRAB SOMETHING AND HANG ON—IT'S LIFT OFF.

THE LIFTERSHIP LEAPT INTO SPACE . . .
. . . TAKING THE SLARN WITH IT.
John Ridgway

LEAVING THE PLANET THEY SPED PAST THE STRANGE DRIFTING CREATURES THAT FLOATED IN SPACE.
FLYNN TO ARGOS . . . WE HAVE THE ROBOT . . . MY REPORT FOLLOWS.
MEANWHILE . . .
WHAT DO YOU WANT THAT FOR?
THE SLARN'S ABOARD. I WILL NEED A GOOD WEAPON.
WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT IS THIS SLARN?

I AM ULA! THE SLARN MENACE WILL DESTROY YOU AND US. ONCE MY PEOPLE WERE SLAVES TO THE SLARN. THEY REPAIRED THEIR ROBOT BODIES—AND CREWED THEIR SHIPS WHEN THEY CONQUERED WORLDS.
CORBS WORE IRON COLLARS SO THE SLARNS COULD ELECTROCUTE THEM WITH ONE TOUCH AT THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF REBELLION.

THE SLARN HAD THE ULTIMATE WAR MACHINE BUILT . . . THEY BECAME THE MACHINE MASTERS.

THE CORBS WAITED THEIR TIME. THEIR TECHNICIANS INVENTED A RAY THAT ABSORBED ENERGY.
...AND DESTROYED THE SLARN — ALL BUT ONE. WE BURIED IT DEEP TO SHUT THE EVIL SLARN AWAY FROM THE LIFE-GIVING RAYS OF THE SUN

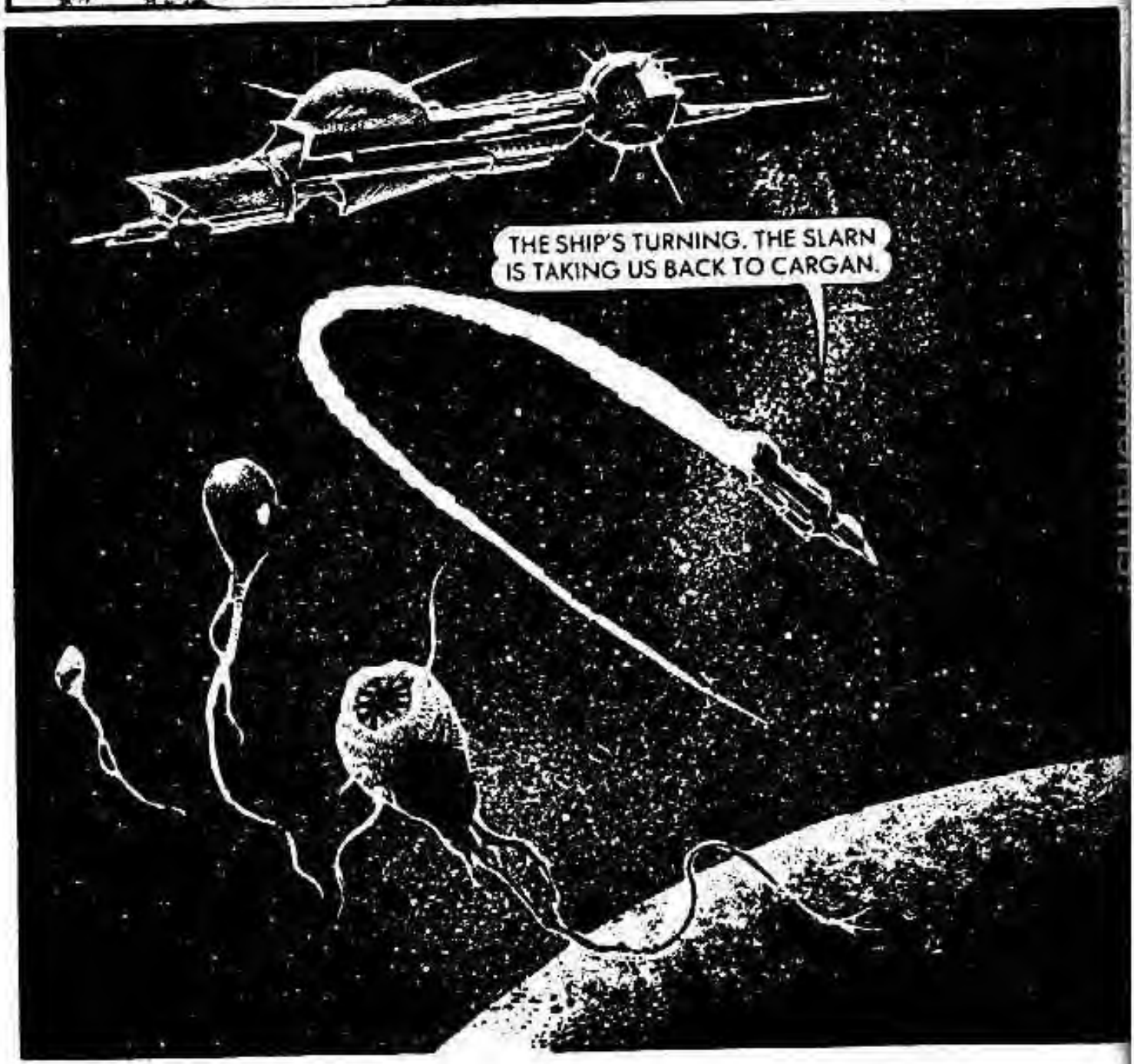
WHAT WAS THIS RAY?
IT FIRED A NEGATIVE CHARGE RAY AND PREVENTED THE SLARN FROM CHARGING UP WITH ENERGY.
THESE SOLAR CELLS POWERED THE MACHINE, BUT THE SLARN HAS NOW GONE.
GONE! BUT WHERE?
TO THE NEAREST MACHINE. IT TOOK OVER YOUR TRANSPORTER AND . . .

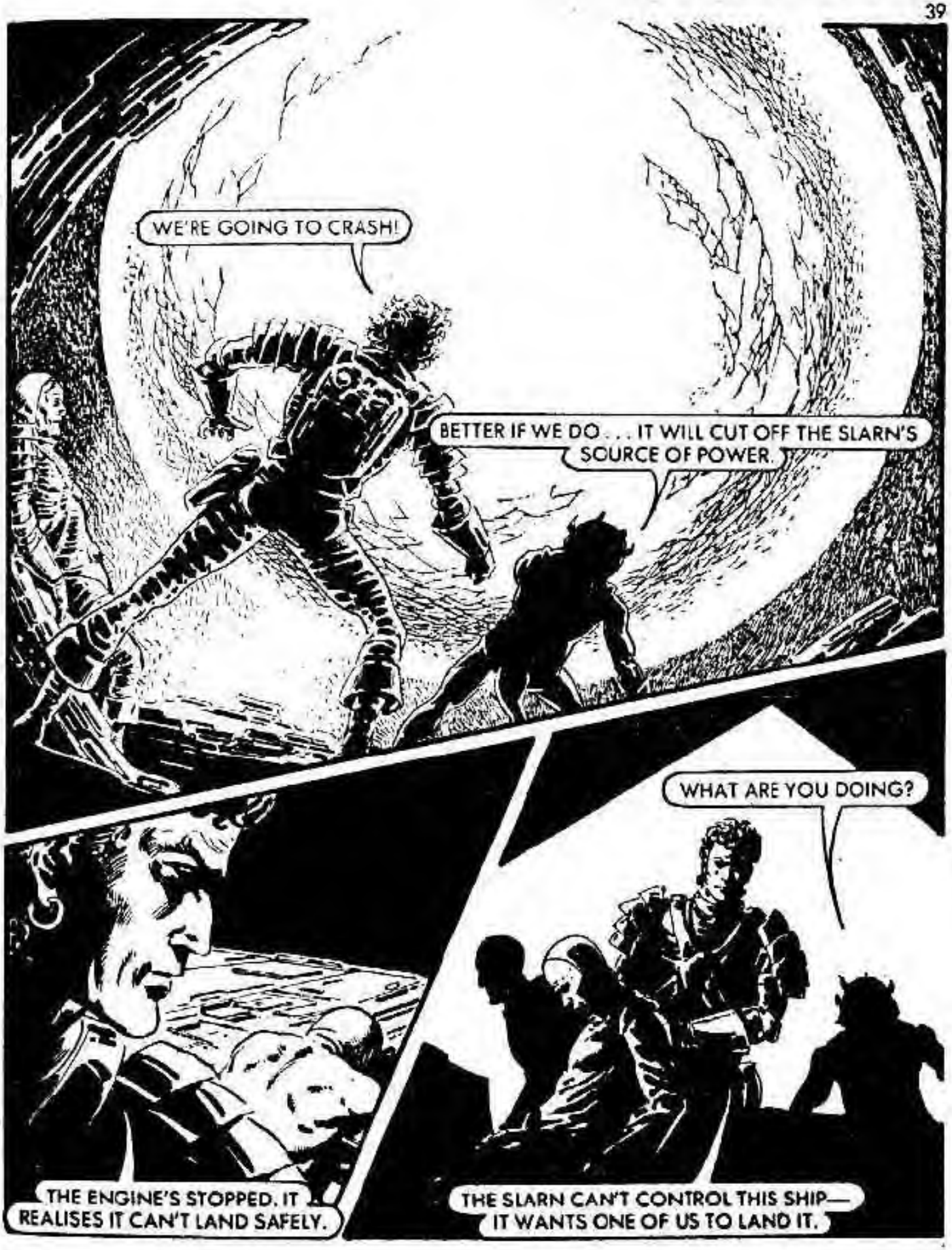
. . . IT WILL TAKE OVER THIS SHIP—UNLESS WE FIND IT.
DANGER
—
HIGH
VOLTAGE
FLYNN, WE'RE IN TROUBLE. THERE'S SOME SORT OF EVIL LIFEFORM ON BOARD.

IF THIS SLARN'S ABOARD WE'D BETTER WARN THE ARGOS.
NO!
COMMUNICATIONS

THE SLARN STRUCK AGAIN . . . WITH FATAL RESULTS.

DEAD! TOUCH NOTHING THAT IS LINKED DIRECTLY TO A POWER SOURCE—OR THE SLARN WILL KILL YOU.


THE SHIP'S TURNING. THE SLARN IS TAKING US BACK TO CARGAN.


WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!
BETTER IF WE DO . . . IT WILL CUT OFF THE SLARN'S SOURCE OF POWER.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
THE ENGINE'S STOPPED. IT REALISES IT CAN'T LAND SAFELY.
THE SLARN CAN'T CONTROL THIS SHIP— IT WANTS ONE OF US TO LAND IT.

YOUR FRIEND IS A BRAVE MAN. HE WILL DIE QUICKLY.
WE'LL ALL DIE IF HE DOESN'T FLY IT. GRAVITY IS PULLING US DOWN. WE'RE ON A CRASH COURSE.
FLYNN TOUCHED THE CONTROLS—
MY LUCK'S IN! THE SLARN MUST KNOW I WON'T LET THIS CRASH—ONLY I'M NOT GOING TO LAND. I'LL PARK THE SHIP IN ORBIT.
RETRO
LEFT

FLYNN FIXED AN ORBIT THAT MEANT THE SHIP WOULD CIRCLE THE PLANET, UNTIL THE ORBIT DETERIORATED AND THE SHIP BURNT UP ON RE-ENTRY.
ALL WE DO NOW IS ABANDON SHIP AND LEAVE THE SLARN.
ARGOS CALLING LIFTER . . . WHAT ARE YOU FOOLS DOING NOW?
THE SLARN'S REACTION WAS IMMEDIATE.
THE SLARN'S LATCHED ONTO ANOTHER POWER SOURCE . . . ARGOS.

TOO LATE TO EJECT—
CRASH POSITIONS EVERYONE.

THE LIFTER SMASHED INTO THE HULL OF THE ARGOS.

. . . need more power.
IN THE CONFUSION NO ONE NOTICED THE SLARN CRAWLING AWAY.

IT SOON FOUND WHAT IT NEEDED.
a control unit must track source
COMPUTER RELAY CONSOLE
FLYNN REPORTED TO THE COMMANDER
. . . SO WE'VE GOT TO FIND THE SLARN AND DESTROY IT.
THE ARGOS WON'T BE SO EASY FOR THE SLARN TO CONTROL. WE'VE STILL TIME TO CALL FOR HELP.
BUT THE MOMENT THE COMMANDER TOUCHED THE VIDCOM . . .

NOT FAR AWAY THE SUDDEN CUT-OFF OF ARGOS' VIDCOM HAD BEEN NOTICED.

THE SLARN WAS IN CONTROL OF ARGOS' GUNS
SKIPPER! IT LOOKS AS IF THE ARGOS IS GOING TO FIRE ON US WITH ITS SONIC CANNON!
SCATTER!
THE BEAM OF ULTRA-HIGH SOUND SHATTERED THE CRAFTS' METAL HULLS.

ONE CRAFT ESCAPED.
IT'S UNBELIEVABLE. SOMETHING OR SOMEBODY MUST HAVE TAKEN OVER THE ARGOS

ON BOARD THE ARGOS.
THE SLARN HAS BEEN BUSY. NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO GET AWAY.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

AFTER A BIG EFFORT THE SLARN IS HELPLESS UNTIL IT RECHARGES ITSELF. YOU CAN ALL ESCAPE. I WILL DESTROY THE SLARN.
THE SHIP WAS SOON READY TO BE EVACUATED
FLYNN, WHERE'S YOUR GEAR?
I'M NOT GOING. ULA NEEDS HELP TO FIND THAT OVER-GROWN SPIDER

THEY'VE ALL GONE . . .
EXCEPT ME!

CAPTAIN PETERS . . .
YOU'LL NEED BRAINS FOR THIS JOB.

THE ARGOS IS A BIG SHIP! WHERE DO WE START?
IT WILL TAKE TOO LONG TO SEARCH, I FEAR.
IF THE SLARN CAN CONTROL THIS SHIP SO EASILY IT MUST BE IN CHARGE OF THE CENTRAL CONTROL UNIT— WHY NOT START THERE?

COMPUTER C
WE MUST HURRY. THE SLARN WILL KNOW WE ARE LOOKING FOR IT.
OH, NO!

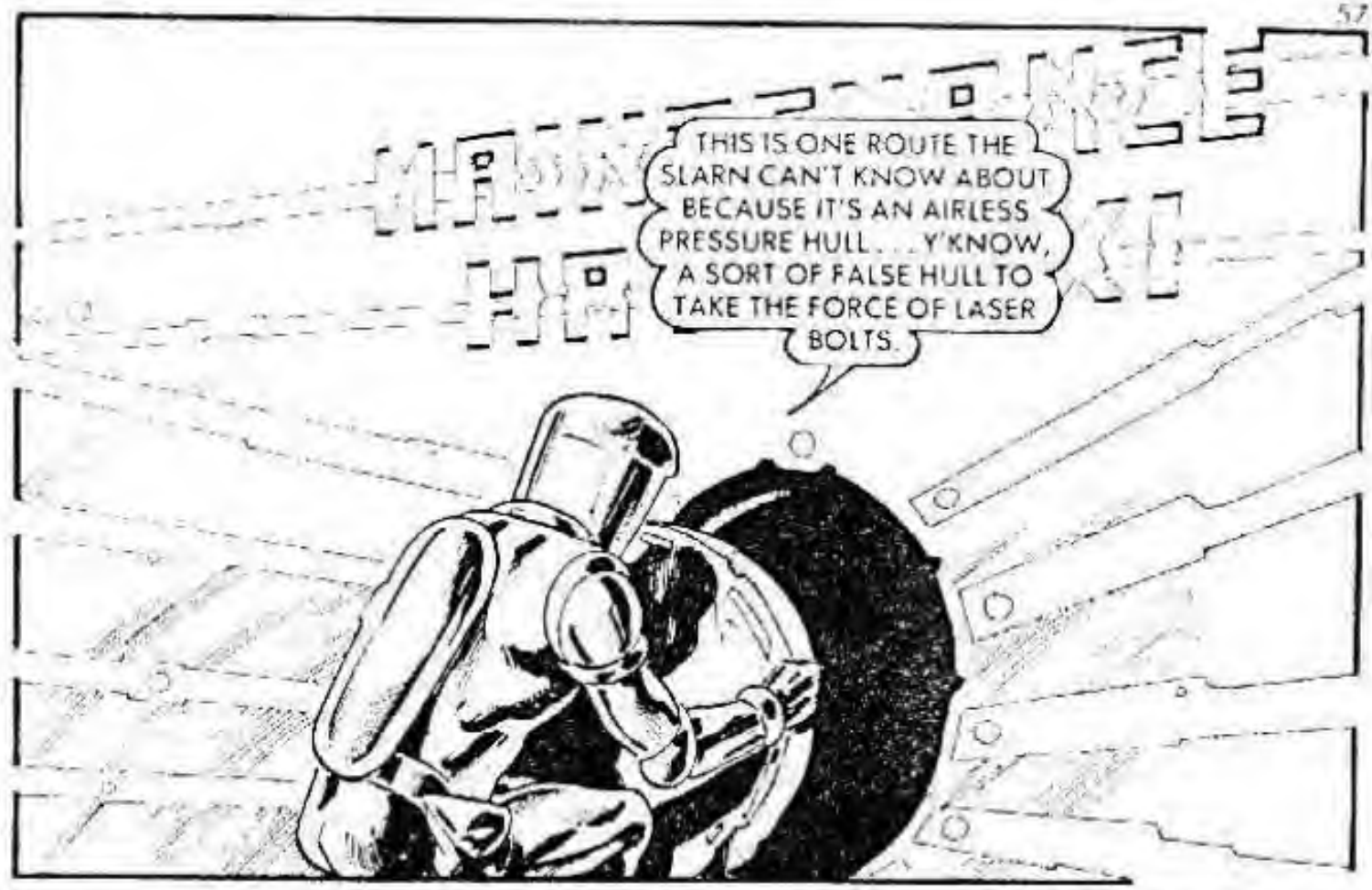
THE SLARN! SEAL IT OFF!
FLYNN WAS TOO LATE.
WHAT'S WRONG, ULA?
BIG TROUBLE. THE SLARN FEEDS ON ELECTRO ENERGY. AFTER IT HAS ABSORBED SO MUCH, IT MULTIPLIES! ONE SLARN CAN SPLIT INTO A MILLION CELLS. IT TAKES ONLY ONE CYCLE FOR A CELL TO MATURE.

WHEN IT SPLITS, IT WILL DESTROY THE HUMAN RACE.
THEY SEARCHED FOR HOURS WITH NO LUCK.
FUNNY . . . CAN'T BREATHE.
HEADACHE . . . GETTING STUFFY.

THE DOOR BEGAN TO CLOSE . . .
THE SLARN. IT'S GOT CONTROL AGAIN. IT'S FEEDING CARBON DIOXIDE INTO THE AIR SYSTEM.
. . . HELMETS . . . OXYGEN.
THE SLARN CAN'T GET AT US HERE. WE'VE ENOUGH AIR AND FOOD CONCENTRATE TO LAST FOR MONTHS.

DAYS WENT BY AND THE SLARN DESTROYED EVERY ATTEMPT TO KILL IT.
THE ROGUE CRUISER ARGOS IS NEARING THE EARTH. ALL ATTEMPTS TO STOP IT HAVE FAILED. THE WORLD GOVERNMENT URGES CALM

ON BOARD THE ARGOS.
LISTEN. THE ENGINES HAVE STOPPED.
THEN THE END IS NEAR. THE SLARN HAS MULTIPLIED AND IT WILL BE SPINNING A PROTECTIVE WEB.
IT'S TAKEN A LONG TIME, BUT I'VE WORKED OUT WHERE THE THING MUST BE. THE BRIDGE IS THE ONLY PLACE WITH ENOUGH OUTLETS TO FEED A MILLION SLARNS. IF WE COULD ONLY GET THERE SAFELY.
BRIDGE


THIS IS ONE ROUTE THE SLARN CAN'T KNOW ABOUT BECAUSE IT'S AN AIRLESS PRESSURE HULL . . . Y'KNOW, A SORT OF FALSE HULL TO TAKE THE FORCE OF LASER BOLTS.

WE'RE IN OUR OWN SOLAR SYSTEM. THE SLARN MUST BE GOING TO ATTACK THE EARTH!

WE'VE STOPPED NEAR THE RINGS OF SATURN. JUST TWO DAYS FROM EARTH.
WE MUST HURRY. THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE.

I HAVE THEM—THE OFFSPRING.

BUT THE DEADLY ADULT WAS NOT FAR AWAY.

THE SLARN ACTIVATED EVERY PIECE OF EQUIPMENT UNDER CONTROL
ULA— LOOK OUT!
THEY RAN FOR THEIR LIVES, WITH THE SLARN YOUNG.
THE WALLS ARE ELECTRIFIED!
THE BULKHEAD DOORS SLAMMED SHUT.
WE'RE TRAPPED

NOT QUITE. THESE LASER TORCHES CAN HANDLE ANYTHING.
THE SHUTTLE BAY. IF IT SHUTS THOSE DOORS—WE'VE HAD IT.
WE MADE IT—NOW HOW DO WE STOP THE SLARN?

THE SLARN WON'T DARE FIRE—IT WOULD KILL ITS OWN YOUNG. SO . . .
. . . ONE OF US MUST GO OUTSIDE AND TRY TO KILL IT IN ITS WEAKENED STATE.

FLYNN TOOK THE SHUTTLE INTO AN ASTEROID SHOWER.
THE ARGOS IS STILL FOLLOWING.

CAPTAIN PETERS CRAWLED OUT OF A HATCH AND ACTIVATED THE ROCK PULVERISER—A DEVICE ON THE SHUTTLE USED TO CLEAR A PATH THROUGH METEOR BELTS.
THE ROCK PULVERISER IS FULLY CHARGED.
LET'S HOPE THIS ROCK PULVERISER DOES THE JOB.
EMPTY
THE CRAFT'S SPEED MUST BE CORRECT. PETERS HAS GOT ONE SHOT . . . AND NOW THE ENERGY BANKS ARE DEAD.

ARGOS PASSED OVER THE SHUTTLE.
IT'S NOW OR NEVER.
SPEED . . . 0.7 . . . REDUCING . . .
PETERS FIRED THE ROCK PULVERISER.

A BULL'S EYE! THE ADULT WAS TOO WEAK TO RESIST THE PULVERISER.
LATER . . .
WHAT DO WE DO WITH THESE? WE CAN'T DISPOSE OF THEM WITH ANY ENERGY BASED WEAPON . . . AT THAT STAGE THEY ABSORB FANTASTIC AMOUNTS OF ENERGY.
I KNOW! BUT WHAT DOES WATER CONSIST OF?
HYDROGEN AND OXYGEN . . . H2O . . . SO WHAT?
OUTSIDE IS TOTALLY DEVOID OF ANY HEAT . . .
H
O

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COME OUT TO THE GALACTIC RIM

WITH THIS MONTH'S OTHER

12p

NOW ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSAGENTS

STARBLAZERS

IN THE CONQUEST OF SPACE 32

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In September 1970 Russia successfully brought some moondust back to Earth using Luna 16. The craft soft landed on the Moon, took a sample, and returned to Earth using the landing stage as a launching pad.